

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20554

Recommendations of the)	
Independent Panel on the)	
Impact of Hurricane Katrina)	FCC Docket No. 06-119
On Communications Systems)	

WRITTEN COMMENTS OF
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I am Don Schellhardt of Virginia. I am a Government Relations attorney, with a cumulative experience of more than 25 years, plus 5 years of experience with State and local courts. My recent career experience has included service as President of THE AMHERST ALLIANCE and Vice President, Government Relations for the NATIONAL ANTENNA CONSORTIUM (NAC). Currently, I am completing a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS) degree from Hollins University, with an interdisciplinary focus on Cross-Cultural Politics. While engaged in these graduate studies, I have acquired an Amateur Radio license and become Acting President of HAMS FOR ACTION (HFA).

I have already been a party to Joint Comments in FCC Docket 06-119, as well as a commenter in numerous other Commission proceedings. In addition, as an individual and/or a representative of organizations, I am co-author of several Petitions For Rulemaking to the FCC. These Petitions include calls for action on Low Power FM (RM-9208, which led to a proposed rule and a final rule) ... Low Power AM (RM-11287, whose outcome is still pending) ... translator reform (not yet Docketed) ... and measures to protect vital civilian electronics equipment

against an Electromagnetic Pulse, or EMP (RM-5528, which was ultimately denied by the full Commission, and RM-11331, which was denied at the staff level but is still pending on appeal before the full Commission).

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The FCC Should Distinguish Between Planning For A Disaster and
Planning For A “Mega-Disaster”

The Commission is respectfully urged to consider, and incorporate into its emergency planning, the concept of a “mega-disaster”. When compared to a more typical or “conventional” disaster, a “mega-disaster” requires an approach which is different in both its nature and its scale.

A proposed definition of a “mega-disaster” was presented to the Commission in my April 12, 2002 Written Comments in Docket RM-10412. That Docket concerned a Petition For Rulemaking, filed by my longtime friend and colleague Nickolaus E. Leggett N3NL of Virginia. His Petition proposed that the Commission should require newly manufactured Amateur Radio equipment to be designed for “field repairability”. While the Petition was unwisely denied, the Docket served to generate considerable input on emergency planning, including the concept of pre-positioned equipment inventories.

The proposed definition of a “mega-disaster”, on page 13 my Written Comments, was as follows:

A life-threatening disaster, either natural or man-made, of sufficient

intensity and scale that it: (a) destroys and/or disables much, most or all of the basic infrastructure and services over at least 10,000 square miles, for a period of at least weeks or months; and (b) prevents and/or significantly restricts the flow of relief supplies and personnel, from areas which are not directly affected, for a period of at least two weeks.

It should be stressed that the filings in FCC Docket RM-10412, including my own Written Comments, post-dated 9/11 -- which was shocking, but fell far short of a mega-disaster -- but pre-dated the genuine mega-disaster of the 2005 Asian tsunami. A second look at this Docket, from the FCC's perspective of 2006, would be useful.

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To this end, I incorporate into FCC Docket 06-119, by reference, the entire public record of FCC Docket RM-10412. Needless to say, I highlight for special attention the concept and definition of a mega-disaster, as set forth above.

Possible Future Mega-Disasters

Applying the proposed definition, set forth above, Hurricane Katrina was arguably a mega-disaster. However, the classification is marginal. When compared to the Asian tsunami of 2005, or certain foreseeable future catastrophes, Hurricane Katrina ranks at the lower end of the mega-disaster scale.

According to most geologists, the following natural events are essentially inevitable, sooner or later, and would likely exceed Hurricane

Katrina in death tolls, disruption of basic infrastructure and obstacles to relief efforts:

1. An earthquake, reaching or exceeding 9.0 on the Richter scale, probably accompanied by a major tsunami, along some or all of the 700 miles of the offshore Cascadia Subduction Zone (Northern California to British Columbia)
2. An earthquake, reaching or exceeding 8.0 on the Richter scale, along the New Madrid Fault Line of southern Missouri (capable of toppling structures in several States)
3. An earthquake, reaching 8.0 on the Richter scale, along any of several fault lines in Southern California (aka “The Big One”)

Ironically, due to ground conditions and a higher level of public agency preparation, the much-feared “Big One” in Southern California might turn out to be the least devastating of these three inevitable mega-disasters.

Similarly, the much-feared “homemade atomic bomb”, detonated by terrorists with a yield of several kilotons, would have a severe but highly localized impact. It would not really constitute a man-made mega-disaster.

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On The Other Hand, the detonation of a single hydrogen bomb, perhaps acquired by terrorists from the Russian Black Market, would indeed constitute a man-made

mega-disaster. A 20-megaton bomb, exploded at ground level with relatively even terrain, would destroy most structures as far as 10 miles from Ground Zero ... destroy some structures as far as 20 miles from Ground Zero ... ignite fires as far as 30 miles from Ground Zero ... and spread lethal fallout 200 miles or more downwind from Ground Zero. Lives would be threatened over tens of thousands of square miles, with infrastructure disruption easily spreading far beyond.

None of the scenarios I have mentioned can be safely ignored. The Commission is duty-bound to consider them, but in doing so it must consciously consider that few if any of the usual “safety nets” will be available for weeks or months.

Implications of Mega-Disaster Thinking

The implications of a mega-disaster are mind-boggling. For example, what if electric power blackouts cover half the country -- and power is not restored for 6 months? Perhaps all gasoline stations should be required to have at least one manually operated pump on hand. Perhaps hospitals should be required to have not only backup generators that run on fossil fuels, but backup generators that run on wind or solar power. Perhaps general aviation airports, and pilots, should be trained and equipped to run and receive emergency airlifts when and if major airports are impaired or destroyed.

Of course, the FCC can deal with only a tiny piece of a huge challenge. Still, in its own area of expertise and responsibility, the Commission must clearly recognize that mega-disaster planning requires “low tech” backups to high tech communications, along with decentralized emergency communicators who have independent power supplies.

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As one part of its planning, the Commission should encourage the recruitment and training of more Amateur Radio operators in a wider range of neighborhoods and communities. At the same time, the Commission should avoid integrating Amateur Radio operators into centralized systems so tightly that hams cannot disengage when and if those centralized systems collapse.

To this end, I recommend careful consideration of all Written Comments in which Amateur Radio operators propose ways they can be encouraged and empowered.

In particular, I commend for swift Commission action, once again, the proposals in this Docket for overriding bans on ham antennas by Homeowners' Associations (HOAs) and/or restrictive covenants and/or landlords -- at least in the case of hams who are also trained emergency communicators.

Conclusion

For the reasons set forth herein, I respectfully urge the Commission to incorporate the concept of a "mega-disaster" into its emergency planning -- with recognition of the unique contributions which decentralized, independently powered, "low tech" Amateur Radio operators can make during and after a mega-disaster. Action to override bans on ham antennas should be part of the FCC's mega-disaster preparation process.

Respectfully submitted,

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